

ACTIVITY: Splashing

CASE: GSAF 1934.12.31.b

DATE: Monday December 31, 1934

LOCATION: Kentucky, George's River, New South Wales, Australia.
34°01'S, 150°E

NAME: Beryl Morrin

DESCRIPTION: A 13-year-old female who lived at Bankston on her family's poultry farm.

BACKGROUND

WEATHER: The sky was overcast. It had rained around 18h00, and the air temperature was 71.4°F.

MOON PHASE: Third Quarter, December 29, 1934

WATER CONDITIONS: The water temperature 71°F.

ENVIRONMENT: The river was 90 metres wide at the incident site, and the incident took place 38 kilometres from the river mouth.

DISTANCE FROM BANK: 10 yards

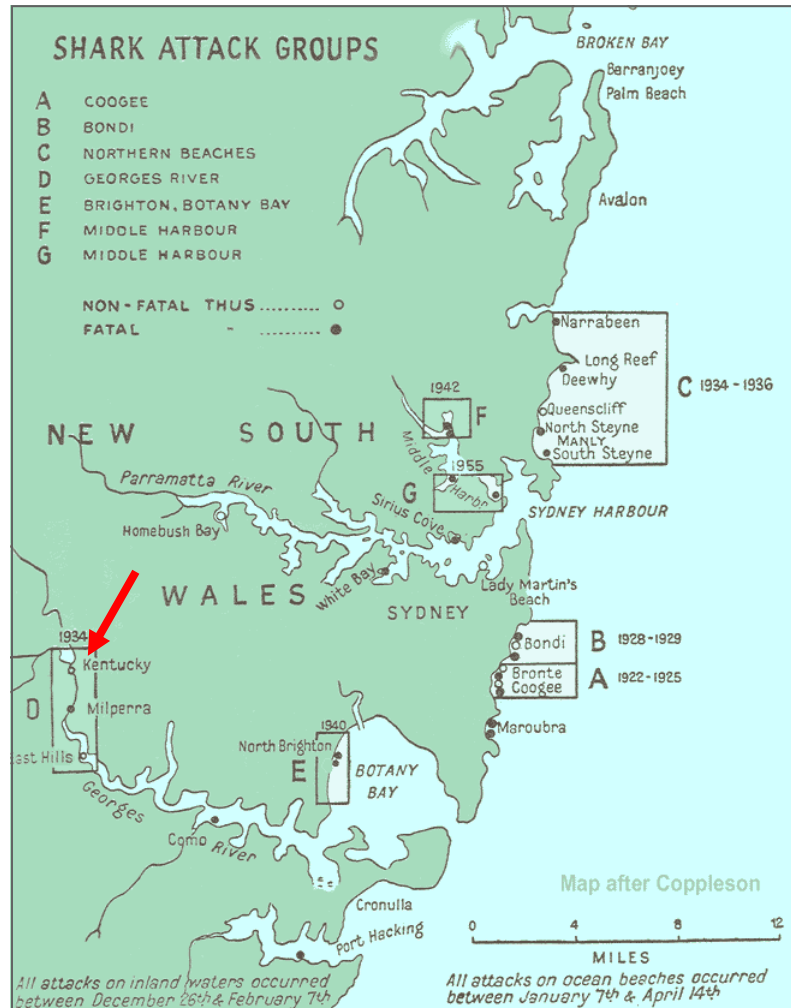
DEPTH: Four feet

TIME: 20h15. It was a moonlit night.

NARRATIVE: It was New Years Eve. Beryl Morrin went to the river at dusk with her mother, her 10-year-old brother Tom, and a few friends. She had finished her swim when someone rubbed mud on her back, and she went back into the water to wash it off. "It was just on dark, and the river was eerie," she said. "Everything happened so quickly, it was petrifying. I didn't even see the shark but there was a lunge and a lot of splashing. I can recall being dragged through the water and tossed like a cork. Suddenly I was free, and on the sandbank. I felt no pain. The only thing I was aware of was a burning sensation of numbness."

She screamed, stood up and held up the stumps of her arms. A family friend, Jim Schofield, ran into the water and seized the child above the elbows, squeezing them to slow the flow of blood.

INJURY: Both hands were severed by the shark.



FIRST AID: Tourniquets were applied immediately. Beryl remained fully conscious until she was put under anesthetic for surgical amputation of what remained of her left forearm.

TREATMENT: At Canterbury District Hospital she was given blood transfusions and both arms were surgically amputated: one above and the other below the elbow.

After she left the hospital, Beryl was given wooden arms but she refused to use them. "They were like logs of wood," she said. "I used to frighten the dog with them — that's about all." For the first few months after the accident she was rebellious and difficult, she said. Her worst ordeal was being fed by other people. "It's awful when someone shovels food into your mouth before you are ready for it. I used to knock the plate on the floor and run from the table in tears." After a period of adjustment, she says that she settled down and decided to lead a normal life.

"If it was impossible, I wanted to do it," Beryl remembers. She joined a bicycle club, learned to write, paint, cook and sew. At 26, she married David Thomas, a greens keeper at a local golf club, and the couple have two daughters. "I don't have nightmares about what happened," she says. "I have a happy life."

SPECIES INVOLVED: It was thought that the attack involved a five foot (1.5 m) tiger shark.

SOURCES: The Canberra Times, Tuesday January 1, 1935, page 1; Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 67 & 233; Alan Sharpe, pages 90-91; The Oshkosh Northwestern (Oshkosh, Wisconsin), Wednesday April 29, 1936; The Sydney Morning Herald, February 3, 1963

Girl's Condition Improved

George's River Shark Attack

SYDNEY, January 1.

Doctors at the Canterbury District Hospital hope to save the life of Beryl Morris, 13, who was attacked and severely injured by a shark in George's River on Monday night. There was a decided improvement in her condition to-day after a blood transfusion, and though she is still weak the doctors believe that her health and youth will turn the scales in her favour. The child's forearms have been amputated, one at the elbow and the other a little below it. She is showing great pluck and cheerfully tells her relatives who visit her that she will be all right.

James Scholfield, the relief worker who went to the child's assistance when she was attacked, was selected for the blood transfusion.

Baits were set to-day in the hope of capturing the shark, but it has not yet been caught. The two attacks on Monday appear to have shaken the morale of the surfers. The surf clubs reported to-day that in spite of the holiday and fine weather there were comparatively small crowds in the surf on the metropolitan beaches.

Central Queensland Herald, January 3, 1935, page 47



*The Labor Daily, February 11, 1935. Smiling brightly despite her grave handicap, little Beryl Morrin, who lost both arms as a result of a shark attack in the George's River on New Year's Eve, had a talk with a nurse at Canterbury Hospital yesterday on the eve of her departure.
Collections of the State Library of NSW.*

*Location of the attack on
Beryl Morrin*



SHARK TRAGEDY

CANBERRA BOY'S DEATH

Attacked in George's River

GIRL MAULED AND MAY NOT LIVE

SYDNEY, Monday.

Mauled by a shark while swimming across the George's River at Milperra, Richard George Foden, who lives with his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, of Westridge, Canberra, died of terrible injuries.

The flesh was torn from his right leg from the knee to the thigh, and he died in the arms of fishermen who waded in to help him out of the water.

Later on, at Kentucky, three miles further up the river, Beryl Gladys Morris, 13, of Bass Hill, was attacked, apparently by the same monster, and is not expected to recover.

Richard Foden, who was staying with his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, entered the river at about 4.30 p.m. to race two companions, his foster brother, Peter Lawrence, of Moorebank, and Ernest Edwards, of Chipping Norton, across the river, a distance of about 50 yards.

Foden quickly took the lead and when about 30 yards across he was seized by a shark. He shouted to the others as the monster attacked him, and although terribly mauled he struck out for the shore on freeing himself from the shark.

Meanwhile, the onlookers had commenced to wade in towards him, and when he was near the sandbank, they grabbed him to carry him ashore, but he died in their arms.

Some of his rescuers were unable to believe that he was dead, and tore up their shirts to bandage his leg, but his injuries were so terrible that he must have lost a tremendous amount of blood, and it was remarkable that he was able to swim after the attack.

The body was taken across the river in a rowing boat and conveyed to the Liverpool Hospital, where life was formally pronounced to be extinct.

The shark was a grey nurse about 12 feet in length and had been seen by fishermen earlier in the day. Several groups of swimmers had been warned not to enter the river.

"GAMEST BOY I EVER SAW"

George Markham, a fisherman, who was an eye witness of the tragedy said that he saw three boys enter the water to race across the river.

"Foden was about ten yards ahead of the others," said Markham, "when I saw the black fin of a shark a few yards away from him. Powerless to move, I saw the shark turn and rush at him. Lawrence shouted 'shark' to the others and the monster struck at him, and the water was immediately tinged with blood.

"I reached him first," continued Markham. "He must have lost a terrible amount of blood and I do not know how he was ever able to swim. He was the gamest boy I have ever seen."

"When I grabbed him, his hand seemed suddenly to go limp in mine. I carried him out of the water but he died in my arms."

Another fisherman stated that he had been fishing all day and had not caught a fish, until a companion had pointed out the shark swimming in shallow water as the cause.

A further shark horror occurred later at Kentucky. News of the tragedy had not reached there when at eight o'clock, Mrs. Morris let her five children go in for a swim. She sat on the bank watching them and heard Beryl call for help. Thinking for a moment that she was only playing, she did not move; but a few moments later she was horrified to see her daughter standing in about four feet of water, hold up the stumps of her arms and cry out: "It's got me."

Joe Schoefield dashed into the water and brought the girl to the shore, while the other children scrambled out of the water. After making its first attack the shark did not return.

The girl was rushed to the Canterbury District Hospital in a serious con-

CRIPPLES RANK AS STAR PUPILS IN ODD SCHOOL

Sydney, N. S. W.—(U.P.)—Children who triumph over great disabilities to obtain an education are the star pupils of one of the strangest schools in the world.

This is the Blackfriars correspondence school in Sydney, which has 5,388 primary and 241 secondary pupils scattered throughout the state, mostly in the wilds where no school is available. So they receive their lessons by post and they make the most of their opportunities.

For instance, there is Beryl Morrin, who lost both hands in a shark attack. By holding a pencil in her teeth or between the stumps of her arms, she has done her school work amazingly well, and her report reads, "Art work sent in so far is excellent." She hopes to be fitted with artificial hands some day.

Then there is "Billy" Maguire, who also has no hands. Using his toes, he writes letters in ink or pencil on ordinary paper "which would do credit to one of equal years and full physical abilities."

Another cripple who writes with his left foot is Donald Dansey. While little Peter Fletcher, of Bui-lamacco, has just passed an examination which the education department allowed him to take orally because he is paralyzed and cannot write. Other stories of brave children are told by the teachers who supply this correspondence education.

*The Oshkosh Northwestern (Oshkosh, Wisconsin),
Wednesday April 29, 1936*

Handless Girl Weds

SYDNEY.—A young woman who lost both hands in a shark attack in Sydney 12 years ago, is now married.

The bride was Beryl Morrin, of Bankstown.

In spite of the loss of both hands, the young bride is able to work without artificial attachments.

The shark attack occurred on December 31, 1934, when she was rescued by a man who couldn't swim, and who risked his life for her.

After having been discharged from hospital, Beryl learned to sew, cook, make beds, ride her bicycle again, and do practically everything she had done before, using only the stumps of her forearms.

The Mail (Adelaide), June 21, 1947, page 2